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**CONTACT:** Jeff Mammenga, Media Coordinator, (605) 773-6000,  
Jeff.Mammenga@state.sd.us

### **Holiday novel being discussed at history book club**

PIERRE, S.D. -- Steve Riedel combined a love of South Dakota and a love for Christmas when writing his first novel.

Riedel's novel, *A Homestead Holiday*, is the December selection for the History and Heritage Book Club. The meeting begins at 7 p.m. CST on Tuesday, Dec. 13, at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre.

Riedel will be the guest speaker at the meeting, discussing the book and answering questions about it. The meeting is free and everyone is welcome to attend.

Riedel will also be doing a book signing of *A Homestead Holiday* from 10:30 a.m.-4 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 16, at the Heritage Store at the state Capitol.

"We believed a novel with a holiday theme would be good for this time of the year," said Patricia Miller, president of the South Dakota Heritage Fund. "Riedel lives in Huron and drew on his roots that run deep in South Dakota in writing the book. We're pleased to feature a holiday book written by a South Dakotan at the book club's December meeting."

The Heritage Fund is the nonprofit fundraising-partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society, which is headquartered at the Cultural Heritage Center. The Heritage Fund and the SDSHS Press sponsor the History and Heritage Book Club.

Riedel describes the book as being about an elderly couple who live on a farm and a contemporary suburban couple. What the two couples have in common is an empty-nest Christmas – each couple will be spending Christmas without their children. The elderly couple invites the younger couple to spend Christmas with them on their farm. Instead of the modern farmhouse that the younger couple expects to find, they find a farm that is falling into disrepair. Both couples wrestle with their loneliness and conflicts arise, but a rewarding Christmas unfolds.

"The premise of the book is if you're faced with the loneliness of an empty-nest Christmas, reach out. You never know when an adventure might unfold," Riedel said.

The inspiration for the book was that he and his wife, Marietta, were faced with their first empty-nest Christmas. Their two children would not be home for Christmas.

"Marietta and I love riding the 1880 Train. I had a vivid dream in which we were hauled away from the anguish of an empty-nest Christmas to a rural farm," said Riedel, who is the associate director of Our Home Inc., a psychiatric treatment facility for at-risk youth.

The 57-year-old Riedel was raised on the family farm near Ramona. His ancestors settled near Ramona in 1879.

"My family was slow to modernize," Riedel said. "I like to say we lived the best of farm life and the worst of farm life in the '50s, '60s and '70s. I'm just old enough to remember my grandfather working his team of horses. As I proceeded into the story, I realized I was going to be able to capture an era not many have experienced, from having horses do work to the technological practices we have today."

The biggest challenge for Riedel in writing the book was overcoming his self-doubt that he could write one.

"I had never written a book before, so I had to answer the question of who am I to write a book in a way acceptable to me. I did a review of my life. I said, 'Why can't I write a book?'"

Riedel not only wrote a book, but had it published last year by Tate Publishing in Mustang, Okla.

"I hope the readers gain a sense of encouragement to reach out to others in times of loneliness like an empty-nest Christmas," Riedel said. "I hope to transport readers who have never experienced that era of farm life to learn about the hardships of farm life, especially the hardships of living in South Dakota in a harsh northern climate. And I hope they find enjoyment and pleasure in reading the words I have arranged for them."

*A Homestead Holiday* is available at the Heritage Stores at the Cultural Heritage Center and the Capitol. Book club members receive a 10-percent discount and SDSHS members receive an additional 5-percent discount when they purchase the book at either Heritage Store.

For more information about the History and Heritage Book Club, call (605) 773-6006.

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*The South Dakota Heritage Fund is a private charitable nonprofit that seeks funding to assist the South Dakota State Historical Society in programming and projects to preserve South Dakota's history and heritage for future generations.*

*The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council, and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society's world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit [www.history.sd.gov](http://www.history.sd.gov) for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.*